The Wellesley Amateur Radio Society: 1970s

By Scott Nacey, KK6IK

My Decade: My Introduction to Ham Radio

I grew-up in the 1970s in Wellesley. The ‘70s produced major shifts in music, fashion (leisure suits anyone?), and politics. But for me it is the decade I discovered the activities that would drive my interests and experiences for the rest of my life.

For our history series of articles, I enjoyed researching the 1960s, especially digging into *The Wellesley Townsman* archives and our existing Spark Gap newsletters, but these 1970s articles are special to me, they are my years, my classmates and my memories. The ham activities I participated in during the ‘70s changed the course of my life including my career in technology, many long term personal relationships and even now, how I find new friends and community in retirement.

WARS President Don Chesley, WA1HVS in 1976 – “In command!”

source: WARS Photo Archive

From Left to Right: Bill Downing, WA1PQY, WARS VP Joe McGrath, WA1JIR and Roger Wilmarth, WA1RSV – Doing generator repairs, 1976

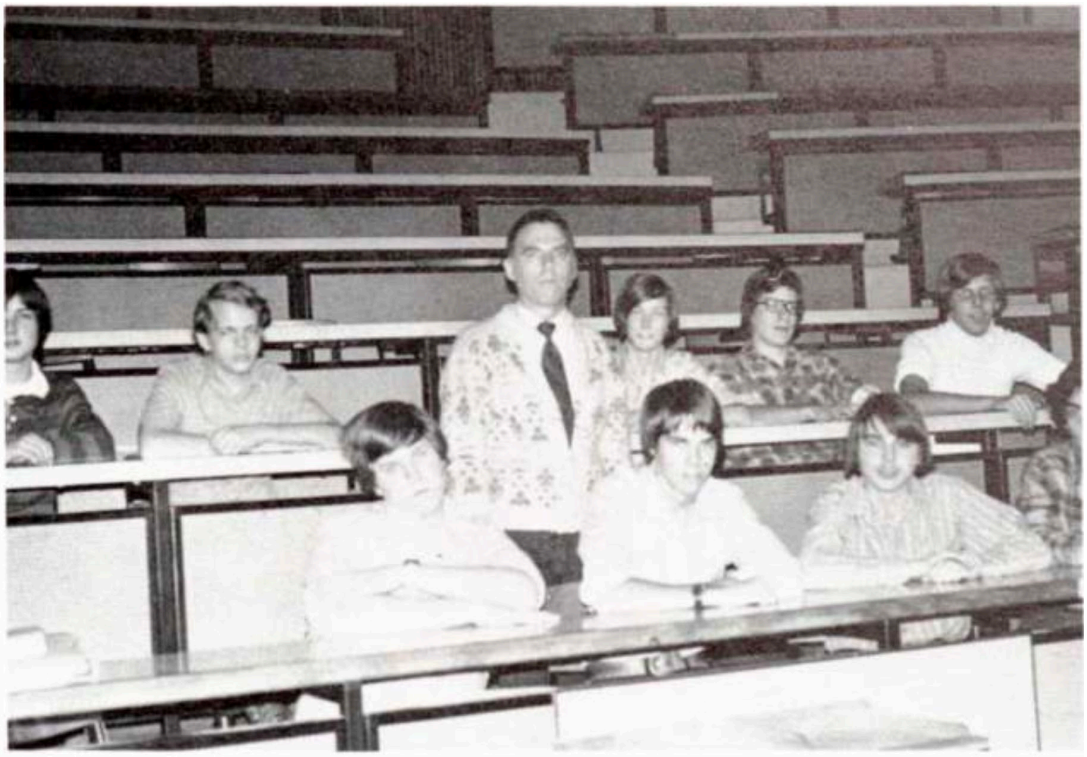
source: WARS Photo Archive

The Wellesley Amateur Radio Society (WARS) was a club on the move in the 1970s. It had new leadership starting in 1971 with President Don Chesley WA1HVS and Vice President Joe McGrath WA1JIR as well as many others who would take their turns in the "driver's seat" throughout the decade. Don, Joe and the leadership team brought the club from a small local Civil Defense oriented focus to an Eastern Massachusetts-wide powerhouse. WARS partnered with other clubs, ran widely attended classes, attracted high school and college students and led new communications efforts which eventually earned full responsibility for the BAA Boston Marathon communications, as well as many other area races in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

The following small note is buried in the September 1976 SparkGap:

> "… Over the summer many of you have been away and it is nice to let people know where you were and what you did. I don't know much of what you did but Gordon Kingsley, WAITAM has been up at Casco, Maine …."

There is not much to this note. Right? Well, Gordon, WA1TAM was a camp counselor at Camp Netop in Casco, ME as a summer job and lucky for me, I was a camper! Gordon brought his secondhand Heathkit HW-100 transceiver and some dipole antennas to set up in the camp library area. The HW-100 was basic, but it worked. I spent many happy hours tuning around the bands on that radio and, occasionally, listening to Gordon make QSO's. This was my first introduction to Ham Radio – and it changed my life.



HAM RADIO CLUB: FRONT ROW, Left to Right: Chad Johnson, Gordon Kingsley, David Curry, Sami Nuwayser. BACK ROW: Scott Nacey, Dale McKay, Advisor Mr. Lydon, Peter Foley, Eddie Jansson, Eric Rasmussen

The Wellesley High School Radio Club in 1977 - see me (back row, left, age 17) – and others who became active WARS members and officers

source: The Wellesley Free Library archives

By late 1977 my step-brother Russ WA1WIX, a freshman at MIT, arranged for me to take my Technician exam at MIT's station W1MX. Miraculously, I passed on the first try and *viola*, I was a ham! Close to the same time, I joined the Wellesley High School Radio club and met a bunch of kids who became my friends throughout the remainder of the 1970s, 1980's and even today in 2025. One of them, Dave Curry (then WA1TAK) now K1TK, became a WARS President along with his many other accomplishments.

*The EICO 753. According to Universal radio "the **worst** HF amateur transceiver ever conceived"*
(introduced as a kit in 1965)
source: Universal Radio website

The WHS Radio club was fun, it even had its own HF gear – an Eico 753, known in the ham community of the time as the "7 drifty 3". The WHS Eico was a terrible radio, the CW side tone was the hum of the power supply. That radio needed at least 1 hour to warm up to the point where it would only drift enough to allow others to track it on the bands. Unfortunately, a high school class period was too short to allow the radio sufficient time to warm up and operate. The Eico's antenna was connected by an ancient, lossy coax run to a Cushcraft vertical with bad traps on the roof of the high school building – where club members couldn't gain access to fix it. In looking at WHS yearbooks going back to 1971 that same nasty old radio was still there. But it was a rig, so it was cool.

Oh, one more thing. No one I knew *ever* made a contact on that radio – go figure!

As with my 1960's article series, I offer personal recollections and glimpses of WARS in the 1970s based on my memory and details from the *Townsman* and our partial collection of Spark Gaps which start in September 1976 and feature the excellent writing and editing of Jim Hatherly WA1TBY, and many other old friends. Enjoy!